

Communication Matters

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Choosing and Using a Cell Phone with a Hearing Aid or Cochlear Implant

By Brenda Battat, Associate Executive Director and
Director of Public Policy at SHHH.



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The new Federal Communications Commission regulation requires hearing aid-compatible digital wireless telephones. Here are the answers to the most frequently asked questions about cell phones and the new FCC regulations.

More cell phones will be manufactured with reduced radio frequency (RF) emissions to minimize interference and make them more hearing aid user friendly as a result of new Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations.

If you are a hearing aid or cochlear implant user, the likelihood of finding a relatively interference free cell phone that will work with your hearing devices has increased because of improvements in cell phones and hearing instruments. However, because hearing loss and hearing instruments are highly individualized, it is still advisable to try out cell phones in the store before making a purchase.

Q. What does the new FCC regulation require?

A. The FCC regulation requires that service providers and manufacturers make available cell phones that can be used with hearing aids starting September 16,

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Support for You

Do you have a question about accommodations for someone with hearing loss?

Would you like a skilled presenter to do a workshop on hearing loss for your staff, partners, or an employer?

Do you need to know what resources might be available for a specific consumer?

Are you developing a new program for consumers with hearing loss, and wish to brainstorm ideas with someone knowledgeable about the population?

Do you have a hearing loss and wonder if accommodations would help you do your job better?

Michigan Rehabilitation Services has contracted with Julie Eckhardt to provide consultant services to MRS counselors, blended staff, management, community partners, and consumers of MRS who have a hearing loss.

Julie has 25 years of experience in the field of hearing loss. She has worked for MRS, in a variety of capacities, since 1989.

Please feel free to contact Julie at any time: 231/922-2943 or jewel@chartermi.net

HEARING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ONLINE GUIDE: Now ONLINE!

The Guide that will help you determine the best accommodation for a person with hearing loss, is now posted on the Internet. Find it on the MRS **E-Learn Community**, in the **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Resource Center** (under Other MRS Programs). It is also available to the public at:

www.michdhh.org/assistive_devices/index.html



Information or news related to Deaf or Hard of Hearing services may be forwarded to Julie Eckhardt at jewel@chartermi.net.

Views expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily the views of Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth-Rehabilitation Services. Communication Matters is available on the web at www.michigan.gov/mrs and on the E-Learn Deaf & Hard of Hearing Resource Center.

2005. The percentage of handsets manufactured with reduced interference will reach 50 percent by February 18, 2008.

The FCC further requires service providers and manufacturers to comply with an American National Standards Institute performance standard (ANSI C63.19) and to show compliance with a label on the box.

To view the complete FCC regulation, go to www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/hac.html

Q. Does the new FCC regulation guarantee that I will be able to use a cell phone with my hearing aid?

A. While there is no guarantee, phones that comply with FCC Hearing Aid Compatibility (HAC) regulations should improve the availability and usability of cell phones for hearing aid and cochlear implant users. Hearing loss and hearing aids are highly individualized so it is still advisable to try out cell phones in the store with your hearing aid or cochlear implant before making a purchase.

Q. When will cell phones that comply with the FCC regulations be available?

A. Some hearing aid user-friendly cell phones are already on the market. The FCC requires that carriers offer phones that comply with HAC regulations by September 16, 2005.

Q. Will a cell phone that complies with FCC HAC regulations be more expensive than other cell phones?

A. No. The range of features and functions of the cell phone will impact on the price, but the hearing aid compatibility will not.

Q. How will I know if a cell phone complies with the new FCC regulations?

A. Beginning in September 2005, cell phones that meet FCC regulations will be labeled with the ANSI C63.19 standard rating “M” 3” or “M” 4” on the box. Only cell phones that meet the standard will have labels on their boxes.

Information about phones that meet the standard will also be shown on the display card by the phone in service provider operated retail stores and in the product’s manual or packaging insert.

Q. What does “M” mean?

A. “M” refers to using the phone with a hearing aid in the microphone setting. The higher the “M” number the more likely it is you will be able to use the phone with your hearing

aid on the microphone setting.

Q. How do I know if my hearing aid is likely to work with a cell phone?

A. Ask your hearing health care provider if your hearing aid has shielding for cell phone RF emissions or if the circuitry design has good immunity to interference.

Hearing aids have ratings similar to cell phones although hearing aids may not be labeled. Most new hearing aids have at least an “M”2” immunity level. Your hearing health care professional may need to contact the manufacturer of your hearing aid to determine its immunity rating.

Q. Are there phones I can use with my hearing aid on the telecoil setting?

A. There may be phones already on the market that will work with your telecoil but they are not yet labeled. The FCC regulations require that cell phones be manufactured for use with hearing aids on the telecoil setting by September 18, 2006. They will be labeled on the box with ratings of “T” 3” or “T”4.”

Attaching accessories such as neckloops is another way to use a cell phone with your telecoil. Your hearing health care professional can assist you in choosing an appropriate accessory.

Q. What does “T” mean?

A. “T” refers to using the hearing aid set on telecoil. The higher the “T” number the more likely you will be able to use the phone with your hearing aid set on telecoil. Reduced feedback and reduced background noise are additional benefits of using a hearing aid set on telecoil during phone use. Once cell phones are rated for telecoil use, to determine the likelihood of successful cell phone use with your hearing aid add the “T” rating number of the cell phone to the “T” rating number of your hearing aid.

Q. May I try the phone before I buy?

A. After September 16, 2005, stores owned and operated by a wireless service provider should provide you with an opportunity to try out cell phones. Some service providers offer that ability today, but the trial period is not required until September 16, 2005.

It’s best to try several phones before making your purchase to find the best match with your hearing aid. You will want to be sure to understand the return policy before signing up for any cell phone or service. Ask the store representative to

clearly and completely state the rules applicable to your trial period. You should be sure that any early termination fees will be waived if you determine that the cell phone you selected in the store does not work for you in other locations.

Since a cell phone's RF emissions can change depending on your location, your listening experience outside the store where you tried your phone may be different. You should test the cell phone in a number of different environments and locations to be sure that it works effectively for you. Please remember that the quality of reception can vary at times.

Q. I already have a cell phone. May I trade it in for a new hearing aid phone?

A. Consult with your service provider.

Q. Does a hearing aid user-friendly cell phone look any different from other cell phones?

A. No.

Q. What if I cannot find a cell phone that works with my hearing aid?

A. You can check with your hearing health care professional to determine if there is a hearing aid option for you that may work better with cell phones. Some hearing aid manufacturers will allow the hearing aid user to send in their aid to be fitted with more immune parts. Your hearing health professional can also advise you on using an accessory such as a neckloop to increase your usability of a cell phone.

Resources

Professional Organizations

Academy of Dispensing Audiology
www.audiologist.org

American Academy of Audiology
www.audiology.org

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
www.asha.org

Industry Associations

ATIS Hearing Aid Compatibility Incubator
www.atis.org/hac/index.asp

CTIA- The Wireless Association™
www.accesswireless.org

Hearing Industries Association
www.hia.org

Universities

Gallaudet University, Technology Access Program
<http://tap.gallaudet.edu>

Georgia Tech Wireless RERC
www.wirelessrerc.gatech.edu

Cellular Manufacturers and Carriers

Cingular
www.cingular.com/about/disability_resources/0,,,00.html

LG
www.lge.com

Motorola
commerce.motorola.com/consumer/QWhtml/accessibility/hearingAid.html

Nextel
nextel.com/en/about/community/accessibility.shtml

Nokia
www.nokiaaccessibility.com/

Research In Motion
www.blackberry.com

Samsung
www.samsungtelecom.com/contact_us/accessibility.asp

Sony-Ericsson
www.sonyericsson.com/

Sprint
www.sprint.com/accessibility

T-Mobile
www.tmobile.com

UTStarcom
www.utstar.com

Verizon Wireless
www.verizonwireless.com/b2c/aboutus/accessibility/index.asp